

school. It was extremely interesting because it was a little bit off by itself. Nobody bothered with it too much. We did what Ben Fowlkes thought it was a good idea to do. If the post needed something done, the post executive officer usually called up and asked us if we could do it and if we should do it, and we'd say yes or no and they'd let it go at that.

I got quarters and then we set up the wedding, and I took six classmates of mine from Benning with me for the wedding in Tuscaloosa, including my four-year roommate as my best man, and four groomsmen and a spare. We married on October 4, 1930, and then went on back to Benning after a honeymoon at West Point. My bride. had never been near the Army until that stage and she started learning things beginning right then, and learning fast.

A year later I became the commanding officer of the 7th Engineer Regiment. In those days the Chief of Engineers put out a book listing the regiments and their commanders. There was "7th Engineers, Second Lieutenant Walter K. Wilson, commanding." This came out about every three to six months. And each time a new issue came out, I'd get a letter from a reserve officer somewhere up in Ohio stating that I was falsely occupying that position, that he was the commanding officer of the 7th Engineer Regiment. I said, "Well, you write that to the Chief of Engineers because I don't care." Nothing ever happened, but that went on and on. I don't know what it was really about. But it was really just a platoon. That's what it amounted to. I had been commanding officer alone for a couple of months when the post executive officer called me in and said, "Weary, have **you** got a lieutenant reporting to you today?" I said, "I don't know, sir." He said, "Well, I think you must have." I said, "Well, how do you know he's for me?" "Well," he said, "there's a young man with castles on, dressed to the hilt with his boots shined and his yellow gloves on, **and** he's wandering around up here at headquarters. Come up and rescue him. He doesn't know what to do with himself." So I went up there, and it was Steve Hanmer, a future major general in the Corps of Engineers.²⁵ Steve showed up and he was green. He'd just washed out

of flying school, and I remember I thought well what did Benny Fowlkes do with me the first day I arrived?

I said, "Lieutenant Hanmer is going to handle the infantry drill today. You and I'll stay in here." So the first sergeant and I stood there peeking out the window. If there was one thing we could do with a little bitty 35-man platoon, it was to do a reasonably passable job of doughboy drill. But within two or three minutes we looked out and it looked like a horde. It was all screwed up. I said to Sergeant McCarthy, "What in the world's going on, can you tell?" He said, "No, sir, I don't know, I don't understand it." So I went out to just watch. I stood where I could listen. And poor Steve, he had gotten excited or something, I don't know what, but he wasn't saying "Squads right, march" or "About face/" he was saying, "Squads-right-march, about-face" very fast, and the troops weren't used to that. So it got a little bit off the timing. I finally signaled for him to call a halt and give them a rest. I said, "Now look, this is your drill, and I'm not going to tell you how you have got to do it, but don't you remember as a cadet the cadence they used? Squads right, march." He said, "Oh, yes, thank you." So then he went back to his doughboy drill.

Once we were asked if we could go out and repair a lot of the culverts and bridges on the trails running all around the place. Fort Benning was the largest military reservation in the U.S. at that time. It was a big station. This was just down our alley. We lined everything up and started out. We had one FWD truck, one motorcycle with a sidecar, and some mule-drawn wagons--that was our road equipment in those days. And we marched out and built several bridges and bivouacked.

One day about noon a Private[F. Kingdon] Schaefer came to me and said, "I want you to see what I have." He pulled out a great big long snakeskin. He'd skinned a rattlesnake. I said, "Why did you do that?" "Oh," he said, "I think they're wonderful." I said, "Don't you know that the mate will find **you out** sometime and **get** even with **you**?" Well, we went on another couple of miles to another place and started working and then decided to



Mrs. Walter K. Wilson, Jr., in 1931 with Stephen R. Hamner (l.) and her husband (r.), both lieutenants.

bivouac for the night. The first sergeant came up to me and said, "You know, we're not anywhere near the main post. Nobody's going to come out here and look at us. Do we have **to** line **up** a company street with pup tents and all, or can we just let them roll up wherever they want to?" I said, "Sergeant, I think you have got a good idea. Let's just let everybody roll up where they want to." So in the middle of the night, about midnight, I heard a terrible shriek. I came up out of my blanket and wondered where it was. Flashlights started focusing on one place. I ran over, and there was Private Schaefer holding his leg. Sure enough he had three penetrations forming a triangle like I remembered a rattlesnake bite to be. I didn't know what to do. So I said quickly, "Does anybody know what you do with something like this besides put on a tourniquet?" We immediately started somebody putting on a tourniquet. I said, "What do we do now? Does anybody know?" By this time Hanmer was there and most of the platoon. Nobody said a word. From my Boy Scout days I remembered you were supposed to get a razorblade and make a cross-hatch cut. I asked, "Does anybody know any better?" No answer. so I said, "Somebody give me a razorblade." Somebody handed me a razorblade, and I said, "Who's going to do it?" No answer, so I said, "Three of you, hold his legs." I made two fairly deep cuts and said I remembered from Boy Scout days that we are supposed to suck out the blood and poison. So I leaned over and started sucking away. After two or three minutes of sucking and spitting, Steve Hanmer tapped me on the shoulder and said, "I'll take my turn now." So I moved over and let him suck awhile. In the meantime we had the truck warmed up to send him back in to the post hospital. We sent a man along to loosen the tourniquet every so often, and then we went on back to sleep. We knew it was about a 45 minutes-to-an-hour's trip to the hospital, so we couldn't know whether he was going to make it or not.

Just before daylight there came a racket and hollering, "Who's the commanding officer of this horde?" And I ran up and said, "I am." It was a medical officer and he said, "Did you send a man in with a snakebite?". "Yes, sir. Is he going to live?" "Well," he said, "that's not my question

now. Did somebody suck the blood?" "Yes, sir," I said, "I did." He opened my mouth up and looked in and felt all around and then shut it. "Did anybody else," he said. "yes, sir. Lieutenant Hanmer." So he repeated the process on Steve. He said, "You're both lucky. You know if you'd have had any cut or a scratch or opening of any kind in your mouth, you would both be dead from the venom." I said, "Can you tell us how Private Schaefer is?" He said, "Well, actually, you saved his life. Why did you do that? Where's the snake kit you're supposed to carry?" I'd never heard of a snake kit. So we soft-pedaled this tale when we later returned to the post. The less said the better. But Private Schaefer returned to the company in about three weeks. About six months later, his father came on a visit. Schaefer brought his father in to meet me, and his father thanked me very much for what I had done. He said, "You saved my son's life. I'd like to know, have you gotten any recognition for this?" I said, "No, sir. We've kind of kept it quiet. We weren't too proud of getting in a fix where that could happen.@" So later, without our knowledge, he went to the post commander, General Campbell King, and told him this tale.²⁶ About two years later when I was a student at Fort Humphreys, an order was issued for a parade and who should be listed to be awarded a Soldier's Medal but me! (Steve Hanmer was also awarded a Soldier's Medal.) In those days I was about the only man in my class who had any ribbon to wear. There weren't many awarded between wars. I knew the sucking was distasteful but not heroic. If I'd have known that it could have killed me, I would probably have been a little more careful. Thinking back on it, they do warn you to be sure there are no broken areas in your mouth before you do something like that. A snake bite kit has a suction cup, but I'd never heard of one. Again, like I said, "Do something!" Well, doing something was the right thing there.

When I first joined Company A of the 7th Engineers as a second lieutenant, I was made the property officer, which meant taking over a post warehouse full of Engineer-type items left over from World War I, and oh what a mess. They had been trying for 12 to 15 years to straighten it out, and they hadn't completed the job yet. I found something

like ten pages of shortages; long pages. so I signed for it, listing all the shortages. Ben Fowlkes said, "Just don't let any more get messed up, and we'll finally straighten it all out some day." So when we left, Steve Hanmer came, and I made him the property officer the same way. **By that** time we had reduced it down to about four pages and we continued to work on it.

Suddenly I got a letter from the Chief's office, about the first part of June, asking me if there were **any** cogent reasons **why** I shouldn't go to Princeton for my advanced degree. I didn't know **any** cogent reasons, but I knew that my wife was from Alabama and that she'd freeze to death in Princeton. She didn't own a fur coat, and I couldn't afford to buy her one. So I wrote a letter explaining the reasons and stating that I'd rather go to California, where we could afford it, than go to Princeton. That's the last I heard of it for nearly two months, and then about the 20th of July I received a telegram saying, "Report to the New York port in four days **for** passage by transport to California to attend the University of California."

I couldn't possibly turn over that company that fast and pack and drive to New York, so I called and asked permission to go overland by car. This of course was risky financially since you might not be reimbursed for anything except what could be related to the specified route, but they told me to go ahead. So we drove, and we drove into Berkeley about the eighth or ninth of August. En route, we had seen the Grand Canyon and been to the Olympics in Los Angeles for a day. We planned to visit my grandparents in Vancouver, Washington, since it was early August, while waiting for the fall semester to start at U.C., presumably in September, but thought we could rent an apartment then while there was no crowd. So we started at the engineering school and went out the gate and stopped at the first decent-looking apartments we saw. And the lady said, "Oh, you're going to be a student here this year?" And I said, "Yes." She said, "Have you registered yet?" I said, "No, we're coming back in September to register." She said, "School starts tomorrow:" That's the first I'd ever heard of any school starting that early. That stopped